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THE BATTLE AT DROOP MOUNTAIN

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NOVEMBER 6, 1863

General William W. Averell

Nearly five months after West Virginia was admitted into the Union, the Confederate army of Brigadier General John Echols still occupied the prosperous Greenbrier Valley region of the new state. From its headquarters in Lewisburg, his army was the foremost defense of the Virginia-Tennessee Railroad, an important Confederate supply line in southwest Virginia.

On August 26 and 27, 1863, the Confederate army had successfully repulsed an attack at White Sulphur Springs by the Federal Army of Brigadier General William W. Averell. In early November, Echols learned that General Averell had left his headquarters in Beverly, West Virginia, and was again moving south toward the railroad. Confederate outposts in Pocahontas County tried to slow the advance.[1] General Echols marched his army north, all through the night, to Droop Mountain to reinforce them.

The reinforcements arrived just in time, for General Averell began his attack early. Throughout the morning, Echols' outnumbered Confederate army held the high ground and blocked the highway with artillery, but in the afternoon was overwhelmed by the crushing advance of Federal infantry on his left flank. Following the collapse of his lines, General Echols retreated south into Virginia with the remnants of his command. Federal troops occupied Lewisburg on November 7, 1863, but being burdened by prisoners and captured livestock, General Averell elected to return to his headquarters in Beverly, waiting until early December to lead a third, and ultimately successful, attack on the vital railroad. Operations in the Shenandoah Valley in the spring of 1864 drew remaining Confederate troops out of West Virginia, thus leaving the new state securely under the control of the Federal government for the remainder of the War.

With more than 400 casualties, (140 Union and approximately 275 Confederate) the Battle at Droop Mountain was one of the last significant Civil War battles in West Virginia.

General John Echols

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